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RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 1996
RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 3394
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 7831
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC 2718
RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASH DC 0014
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 SAO PAULO 000150

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STATE FOR WHA/BSC, DRL/IL, INR/IAA, INR/R/AA
STATE PASS USTR FOR CRONIN
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STATE ALSO PASS TDA FOR ANGULO AND MCKINNEY
NSC FOR FEARS
TREASURY FOR OASIA, DAS LEE AND JHOEK
USDOC FOR 4332/ITA/MAC/WH/OLAC
USDOC FOR 3134/ITA/USCS/OIO/WH/RD
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DOL FOR ILAB
USAID FOR LAC/AA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [BR](#)
SUBJECT: MST INVASIONS IN WESTERN SAO PAULO STATE

REF: (A) SAO PAULO 129 (B) 06 BRASILIA 1138

(C) 06 SAO PAULO 332

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Summary: Since February 18, Brazil's Landless Movement (MST) has invaded thirteen farms in the far west of Sao Paulo state. The de facto leader of the actions has indicated that more invasions are forthcoming if the government does not get serious soon about land reform and redistribution. In what appears to be a new twist, agricultural workers affiliated with the United Workers Center (CUT), Brazil's largest labor confederation, which is itself closely linked to President Lula da Silva's Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores - PT), have been participating in the invasions. The MST is calling on the state government to enter into a dialogue, but a member of Governor Jose Serra's cabinet has stated that while the state government is prepared to take action to ameliorate the land situation in the troubled Pontal region, per the 1988 Constitution, agrarian reform falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government. A separate group, the Landless Liberation Movement, has reportedly carried out an invasion of its own in Minas Gerais state. The social movements may be trying to get President Lula to pay more attention to their concerns as he begins his second term. End Summary.

NO CARNAVAL FOR THE LANDLESS

12. (U) The Rural Workers' Landless Movement (MST) has conducted thirteen land invasions in southwestern Sao Paulo state over the past five days. Per ref C, the area of activity, known as the Pontal do Paranapanema, has historically been the site of land disputes, with allegations of forged land titles and illegal sales of property. In a number of cases, the state has tried to reclaim title, with cases languishing for years in the courts. The MST has taken advantage of the ambiguity over ownership by claiming the land belongs to nobody and thus should be redistributed to the landless. Some of the properties invaded are located in the Alta Paulista area adjacent to the Pontal.

13. (U) Background: The MST was formed in 1985 to campaign for agrarian reform. Since then it has staged numerous of occupations of public and private "unproductive" land to pressure the federal and state governments to speed up and increase the scope of land reform. Its activities have brought it into conflict with a number of local landowners and with the government. MST routinely invades and occupies farms it considers unproductive. While occupying the farms, MST members usually slaughter livestock and harvest crops to feed themselves. When a judicial order is issued, they usually vacate the premises but do not respond for the damages. End Background.

14. (U) This week's land invasions have been carried out under the leadership of Jose Rainha Junior, a long-time leader of the MST in the Pontal who, as recounted ref C, was divested last year of responsibility by the MST national leadership for allegedly failing to obey orders and to adhere to the principles and norms of the landless movement. Rainha was apparently leading invasions and trying to negotiate on behalf of the MST without authority to do so.

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With respect to this week's activities, the MST has confirmed that some 2000 members have participated in the land invasions, and has so far not publicly disavowed either Rainha or his actions. He reportedly directly controls nine of eleven squatter camps in the Pontal, comprising some 1500 people, and administers the other two. According to press reports, he wields influence over some 6,000 settler families in the region.

15. (U) Biographic Note: Rainha was convicted in 1997 of orchestrating the murders of a local landowner and a policeman in the state of Espirito Santo. Rainha was sentenced to 26 years imprisonment on charges of homicide in a trial which, according to Amnesty International, did not meet international fair trial standards. Under Brazilian law, anyone sentenced to more than 20 years in prison is automatically entitled to a second jury trial. A jury acquitted Rainha in the retrial on the murder charges, reversing the 1997 conviction. In 2005 he and three other MST leaders were found guilty of arson, robbery, and other charges and sentenced to 10 years in prison. The charges stemmed from a 2000 invasion of the Santana de Alcidia farm in Sao Paulo state. Rainha, then a fugitive from justice, was arrested in 2002, but was later released by Brazil's Supreme Court. End Biographic Note.

16. (U) Rainha, 45, was associated with President Lula in the 1980s when they were both union leaders fighting Brazil's military regime. He has stated publicly that Brazil has one of the worst land distribution ratios in the world, with about half of all arable land in the hands of about two percent of the population. The press is full of speculation that his current activities in the Pontal could get him sent back to jail, a prospect he claims not to fear.

LABOR CONFEDERATION SOLIDARITY WITH MST?

17. (U) Something new in the recent land occupations is the involvement of the United Workers' Center (CUT), Brazil's largest labor confederation. The CUT's National Executive issued a statement in support of the MST's actions on the grounds that the struggle for land reform is legitimate. At the same time, an official at CUT headquarters in Sao Paulo told Econ Specialist that

CUT supports the MST struggle for land reform but does not participate directly in violent land seizure or occupation of farms that the MST considers unproductive. The CUT representative said that the occupations near Presidente Prudente, a city in the Pontal, were a decision of local unions affiliated with CUT and that the CUT is not responsible for their acts. A leader of the Sao Paulo state CUT, Edilson de Paula, was quoted by media as saying some 800 agricultural workers and unemployed CUT members have participated in the invasions. However, the CUT coordinator in Presidente Prudente echoed the position of the national organization, asserting that the CUT does not participate in land occupations and attributing activities to that local agricultural worker's unions affiliated with the CUT. Edilson de Paula stressed that the CUT has always respected the autonomy of its constituent unions and considers the land occupations appropriate because land reform has moved so slowly in Sao Paulo state.

18. (U) Meanwhile, Sao Paulo Secretary of Justice Luiz Antonio Guimaraes Marrey expressed a willingness to meet with MST leaders to help resolve the dispute, but stressed that the occupations were illegal and that the squatters would have to withdraw from the land before negotiations could take place. On February 22, a judge in Santo Anastacio (near Presidente Prudente) ordered squatters to

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withdraw from three of the properties, threatening daily fines in the case of non-compliance. The judge was responding to a complaint filed by the Rural Democratic Union (UDR), which represents landowner interests. The UDR plans to file more court cases in the hopes of getting the land cleared of squatters and bringing the invasions to an end. Police expect the MST to withdraw from the three properties by late Friday.

FEDERAL VS STATE GOVERNMENT

19. (U) Marrey also noted that while there were certain actions the state government could take to help resolve some land disputes and distribute more land to those who need it, ultimately it was the federal government that would have to act, since the Constitution assigns responsibility for land reform to the federal government. He noted that the MST and CUT have close political ties to the federal government and suggested that they should direct their demands to Brasilia. (Note: The state government is in the hands of the main opposition party to President Lula's Workers Party (PT); Governor Jose Serra of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) ran unsuccessfully against Lula in 2002 and is expected to be a candidate again in 2010. End Note.)

110. (SBU) Guilherme Cassel, Minister for Agrarian Development, which is responsible for land reform, noted the historical tensions over land in the Pontal and intimated that invasions are understandable in certain cases in which justice has been long delayed. He criticized the state government, which he said should be working in partnership with the federal government to resolve the problem. Cassel and his predecessor, Miguel Rossetto, both belong to the leftist Democratic Socialism faction of the PT, and are both from Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil's southernmost state, as is the faction's leader, state legislator Raul Pont. Rossetto resigned in March 2006 to run unsuccessfully for the Senate and is now considered a likely candidate for Mayor of Porto Alegre. The Democratic Socialists are close to the left-wing social movements that make up a considerable part of the PT's base, but are currently in strife with the party's more moderate Majority Faction (see ref A). Despite this supposed closeness, MST leader Rainha was unsparing in his criticism of the Lula government's inaction on land reform issues and stated that removal of Cassel and appointment of a Minister more willing and able to implement rapid and comprehensive land reform was one of MST's conditions for retreating from the occupied land.

RETURN OF THE MLST

¶11. (U) A separate group, the Movement for the Liberation of the Landless (MLST), carried out an occupation February 20 in the so-called "Mineiro Triangle" of Minas Gerais state, north of Sao Paulo. Their stated intention was to pressure the Institute for Colonization and Land Reform (INCRA) to create more settlements. MLST is the group that undertook a violent invasion of the Chamber of Deputies in June 2006 (ref B). Its president, Bruno Maranhao, was suspended from his position as PT Secretary for Social Movements and membership on the party's National Executive Committee in the aftermath of that incident.

COMMENT

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¶12. (SBU) Comment: The MST is clearly trying to test the mettle of the new administration of Sao Paulo Governor Jose Serra. Many of the land initiatives undertaken by ex-Governor (2001-06) and later presidential candidate Geraldo Alckmin became bogged down in bureaucracy and bore little fruit. The MST may be hoping to extort better results from Serra. At the same time, leftist elements of the PT repeatedly expressed frustration during President Lula's first term that despite his background in poverty and the labor movement - he helped found both the PT and its sister organization, the CUT - he has governed Brazil like a centrist and has not done nearly enough for the poor. Now that he has been re-elected, the social movements are hoping to collect on what they think he owes them. End Comment.

¶13. (U) This cable was coordinated/cleared with Embassy Brasilia.

MCMULLEN